

LEAN THINKING IN WHOLESALE DISTRIBUTION...



From “MCA Talk”...

A Guest Actionable Insight



Wireless IoT Dash Buttons for Vendor Managed Inventory Resupply Programs

...Meet the B2B EZ Button...

By Mike Blasdell, MindHARBOR

We opened our doors as MindHARBOR in January of 2000 as the IT Department spin-off of a publicly traded medical manufacturing company. Early on we partnered and worked with late friend and mentor Jay Conrad Levinson Author and Founder of Guerrilla Marketing in providing all types of web/tech services to all sorts of businesses large and small...

Over the past 18 years we have evolved into a custom software application and business intelligence development shop that is called on by over 300 users of the Prophet 21 ERP system (and a few other leading legacy systems).

“ Our mission and focus, is helping manufacturers and wholesale distributors save time, money, and/or drive revenue with cutting edge technology...on time, on spec, and on budget! “

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To execute that mission, we practice Guerrilla-Tech (‘nology) proudly serving as builders of custom apps, miners of data, and firefighters...in attacking special projects & business challenges. Our philosophy is always to serve as consultants first, and as programmers/developers second in bringing value to our customers.

This is a story about one of our recent adventures: Jergens Industrial Supply (JIS), a leading Ohio area/Midwest Industrial Distribution Company and founded in 1960, challenged us a few years ago to find a way to correct inefficiencies in their AutoCrib (vendor managed) supply chain solutions.

Jergens, a long-time user of the Epicor Prophet 21 ERP system for Wholesale Distributors wanted us to build a better mouse-trap between AutoCrib and P21. We initially approached the AutoCrib team for their help and they’d told us very clearly, that we were taking on the impossible. Which sold us, and we dove in on that project...

Soon after successfully integrating AutoCrib with Prophet21, we began to have brainstorming discussions with Matt Schron and Tony Filipovic at JIS about developing further innovations in making resupply easier for their customers.

Both of our teams had read about and had started playing with the IoT Dash buttons that Amazon was bringing to market. We were also in the process of engineering a customer service center (portal) that serves as an integration point for P21 users and their customers to access data, resupply of products via web, phones, tablets, and/or in filling any other gaps in customer-centric value adds that typical e-shopping carts were simply missing or unable to provide.

Out of those discussions a plan and a project roadmap were quickly developed to engineer a custom solution that enables on premises remote resupply of products from wifi enabled IoT Dash Buttons, through our web portal and into Prophet 21 (or any other legacy system).

That project now called JIS Express, has gone so well for Jergens that they not only use it very successfully with their customer base, we’ve also now partnered with them to one-stop distribute our IoT-Tech software with the hardware to companies that are interested in bringing similar supply chain efficiencies and customer-centric value to their clients.

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Meet the B2B IoT EZ Button



So what are IoT Buttons?

The Amazon Dash Button is a small electronic device designed to make ordering products easy and fast. The Dash buttons come in packs; each device contains an embedded button that can be brand customized with a distributor's name and/or the name of a frequently ordered product.

Who needs IoT Resupply Buttons?

Our solution provides a replenishment method that is offered to customers to maintain inventory. Critical Items for production Non-Critical Items for production Facility maintenance items Larger oversized items that would not fit into a vending machine, for Example: Paper Towels, Shop Rags, Toilet Paper or Coolants. It's effectively *the* B2B EZ button for any product or service while providing an IoT ready, ERP integrated platform that can scale as IoT hardware and embedded technology becomes available.

How are they used?

Easily configured/customized they can be installed anywhere, connect them to an on premise wireless network, and let the ordering begin. If a button is pressed multiple times, the button will only submit one transition for the order quantity each 24hr period. Each button lasts for approximately 2000 clicks/orders and currently costs \$19. These early costs are expected to drop significantly as demand/use is exploding, new features/uses are also projected to increase exponentially.

Where?

IoT Buttons can be installed in a facility or anywhere they are needed (within reach of wifi). Stick them on racks, shelving, on or next to equipment, drawers; or anywhere you can think of. They can even be mounted together in control or stockroom on a 'dash-board' with product information under each sku.

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How does this solution work?

Hardware in the form of a Dash Button (or other sensor, controller, IoT thing) coupled with wifi to a secure web access point and into P21 through SISM. In this configuration pushing a button triggers an order. One push equals one item at pre-configured reorder quantity and a confirmation email is triggered. Once the button is pushed an order notification is delivered by email to a pre-approved order manager. Confirmation orders are sent via email and include a link to the customer control portal with is a secure webpage accessible by smartphone, tablet or Pc. The order notification alerts track all buttons pushed in 24hour period.

Once the order manager clicks the link within the order notification email, they are able to view the customer control portal where this will allow the customer to review, edit, and/or approve the items that were pressed in the past 24 hr. Managers can confirm order, change amounts, add Purchase Order Numbers and Delivery requests. The system is designed to batch all the items at 3:00pm every day. This will allow the order to be built and reviewed each day by the customer. It would then be submitted to the distributor for processing and fulfillment.

Confirmed orders go directly from the customer portal and import directly into the Prophet 21 (or other ERP) system using the scheduled import service manager as an unapproved order. Orders are then reviewed and approved for delivery and then either shipped to the customer for replenishment or delivered by the distribution team.

This software can be installed as is for P21 system users, or fully customized to offer a wide array of P21/other ERP integrated features for online customer service centers, remote resupply, and/or other customer-centric features. Providing an integrated and scalable platform that will enable connections with other IoT Technology sensors, controls, and tools as IoT Technology evolves.

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For more information or to subscribe to our free Adventures-in-P21 Industry eNewsletter (now reaching over 2400 P21 system users), please email Mike Blasdell (Blaze@MindHARBOR.com) for more information. We can also be found online at www.MindHARBOR.com